

Moving from Intention to Action Speaking Script: Part One

Greetings VISTA supervisors! Thank you for taking the time to listen to Part One of a two part series titled, Moving from Intention to Action. My name is Shannon Stober, and before we jump in, let me tell you a bit about myself. In 2002 I enrolled in VISTA and went on to complete two-terms of service. Since that time, I've held a variety of staff positions with National Service programs and I have also supervised VISTAs. Folks who know me know that AmeriCorps is "my thing." I am extremely passionate about these programs, these members, and the amazing partners, like those of you listening in, who support service in communities across America.

Clearly, all of you are great supervisors who work hard to improve your skills, but even the best of us get caught up in the day-to-day and lose sight of our intentions, resulting in a feeling of chronic overwhelm. The good news is that after several years, and a fair amount of practice, I've finally identified a few tools that help me ensure I am staying on top of my various VISTA commitments. I've organized these tools into a framework that I call the three P's. Which stand for Prioritize, Plan, and Practice. In this session we will be covering the first P, Prioritize, and we've created a handout for you to use as you follow along.

Prioritization represents our commitment to creating the time to focus and work proactively. Now, we all know that when we focus on the tasks that are most important, and commit ourselves to working on them proactively, both the quality and quantity of our work increases, and our stress and overwhelm decrease. But knowing that doesn't make it easy to do, and there are a few reasons why. First, we've been taught that multi-tasking and being busy are indicators of our success. We've learned to see our busyness as a point of pride and wear our stress as a badge of honor. As a result, many of us have become attached to the feeling that comes from being overwhelmed, and we begin to find comfort in it. When challenged to change our approach we react by saying "I don't have time!" And we honestly believe we don't.

But the truth is we all have time, and in fact, there's ample research that demonstrates how often we underestimate the amount of time we have and how frequently we overestimate the amount of time we need. This happens because we're not paying attention to where we place our time. For example, have you ever found yourself spending an hour making small formats to a document, when it really didn't need to be perfect? Or what about attending a meeting and spending the first 20 minutes on a totally unrelated topic? Did you know that these little distractions and time wasters amount to an average of 8-hours of lost time every week? Now, we're humans, we're not machines, and it'd be unreasonable to expect us to fill every minute of our workday productively. But, what if we decided to claim just two of those hours each week to focus and work proactively towards planning, strategizing, and goal-setting for our VISTA project? Chances are, two hours a week would go a long way towards moving your supervision goals from intention to action. So, let me walk you through a few strategies you can use to really prioritize your time.

The first strategy to prioritization is to distinguish between the various work activities you spend your time on, and there are four categories you can use to help you do this, which you can find on page one of your handout. The first category is called firefighting, which represents the time we spend on looming deadlines, crises, and unexpected emergencies. These are the tasks that if not dealt with immediately will create significant consequences, many of which are the result of poor planning on our part. The second category is called distracting, and this is where we find ourselves falling into the traps of perfectionism, indecisiveness, and where we often confuse activity with productivity. The third category is called wasting, and this is where we see ourselves spending time on things that have no relationship to our goals, like checking our personal social media accounts. The final category is called investing, which represents the time we commit to proactively working on our goal-setting, planning and relationships. Investing is where we want to spend the bulk of our time as it represents that focused, proactive zone.

Your next strategy toward prioritization is to conduct a personal time study and get an honest handle on where you're losing time to distracting and wasting, and where you can create additional space for investing. Personal time studies

are simple, and you'll see that on pages 2 and 3 of your handout we've created a time study template for you to use. To begin, you'll pick a week and commit to pausing every 30 minutes to quickly jot down what you're doing. It only takes a second, and the information it uncovers is well-worth it. Once you've completed your time study, look through the various activities that consumed your week to tease out the distractions and wasters. The wasters should be easy to identify so you're simply looking for an honest tally of how much time you spent there. The distraction activities are little trickier, and the key is to assess whether the activity in question produced something of value, or if the task could have been completed more quickly. Questions you can ask yourself to clarify include "what was accomplished through this activity?" and "does this activity directly relate to my VISTA supervision responsibilities?" Answering these questions usually yields surprising insights into how we're spending our time and gives us concrete ways to reclaim a couple of hours for proactive work.

Once you've completed your time study and identified where you can reclaim a couple of hours each week, it's time to move your intentions to actions through a final strategy called time-blocking. If you're unfamiliar with time -blocking, it's a very simple, yet very powerful technique, that you'll see on page number four of your handouts. When we time-block, we literally block time in our calendar for specific projects the same way we would block time for a meeting, a conference call, or an event. Let's take VISTA reporting as an example. What if, instead of trying to crunch reporting in as the deadline looms-making it a firefighting activity-we blocked an hour each week to open our tracking sheet and task list, and worked on it proactively? The result would be an updated, well managed system, and ideally the week of the deadline would arrive and find you simply reviewing your work to ensure that what you submit is high-quality. It's possible, if we time block, but we have to honor these time blocks the same way we honor the other commitments in our calendars. Tell your colleagues you're unavailable, close your email, and let your phone go to voicemail. Again, because we're conditioned to believe that multi-tasking is a good thing this will feel strange. That said, I promise you that if you give time blocking a chance, and allow yourself to adjust to the new method, you'll find yourself wondering why you didn't do it sooner.

I believe you'll find that the prioritization strategies we've covered in this session are great tools to use as you begin to move your VISTA supervision goals from intention to action. I want to thank you for taking the time to listen in today, and for committing yourself to National Service by supporting AmeriCorps VISTA. Now, check out part two of Moving from Intention to Action where I will cover the remaining components of the three P framework, planning and practice.

Moving from Intention to Action Speaking Script: Part Two

Greetings VISTA supervisors, it's Shannon Stober again, and thank you for joining me for Part Two of our Moving from Intention to Action audio session! In part one of this session I introduced the three P framework I use to stay on top of my VISTA responsibilities, which stands for Prioritize, Plan, and Practice. In that session we covered prioritization, and in this session, we will be covering both planning and practice. Like last time, we will reference the handout we created as you follow along.

Let's begin with planning. Different people have different strengths, and each of us brings something unique and powerful to our role as a VISTA Supervisor, but it's not always planning skills, which are essential to moving our intentions to actions. I'm going to walk you through a 5-step process I use to provide you with a few techniques that might help you increase your planning capabilities. We'll use the goal of recruiting a VISTA as our example.

The first step of the process is to identify an end date. So, for VISTA recruitment, this is a date that will probably be informed by your project sponsor or your state office. My practice is to make my personal end date earlier than it needs to be. For example, if you're told recruitment needs to be wrapped by say, March 15th, you'll want to set your own end date as March 1st. The goal here is to do your best to schedule enough time to accommodate the unexpected things that will surely arise.

Once your end date is identified, you'll move to step 2 of the process, which is to generate a list of tasks that need be completed to accomplish the goal. This is where resources like the VISTA Campus come in handy. When you visit the VISTA Campus, you'll see that all the recruitment activities are broken down into a series of steps, and that there are a variety of resources and tools provided to help you fully understand what needs to be done. Once you've generated a list of tasks from the VISTA Campus, you'll want to think about your organization's specific needs as well as the activities you may need other people in your organization to complete. When your task list is done, you'll arrange them in chronological order, like the example we provided in the handout.

Now you're ready for step 3-- which is building your timeline. This step is simple, start with your end date, and build back beginning with the last task you listed when you arranged them in chronological order. For example, if the final task you listed for your VISTA recruitment activities was selecting your VISTA candidate, you'll schedule that to be completed one-week prior to your end date. You'll then work backwards to add the remaining tasks, and remember, the more wiggle room you create in between tasks, the more likely you are to stay ahead of things.

Step 4 of the planning process is to share your timeline with the members of your team who need to be involved with the work. This is an important step. Don't make the mistake of assuming a decision-maker or contributor will be available at a certain time, only to find out that person is on vacation when they're needed. If the timeline doesn't work for your team, adjust it proactively during the planning process.

Your final step is to put your planning intentions into action by pulling out the tasks you assigned to each week, putting them in your work plan, and blocking time for them in your calendar like we discussed in part one. I personally like to do this on Friday afternoon. I look over my timeline and pull out the tasks for the week ahead. I then review my calendar and block my time accordingly. I make a big note on the top of my work plan naming what tasks I need to accomplish that week to stay on track with my timeline, and I briefly review everything on Monday morning to remind myself of what I need to focus on before I jump into the week. I find this planning process helps me make sure I'm working on the right things, at the right time. If you ever need a reminder of these project planning steps, you'll see that they are listed along with links to the resources we mentioned, on pages one and two of your handout.

The last p stands for practice, and practice represents our commitment to ourselves and our VISTAs to improve our supervision skills. Practice is where we move from intention to action and signifies the heart we put into it. Applying ourselves to the practice is always a personal thing, but there are a few strategies for practice that I'd like to share with you.

First, I think it's important to view our practice as a new habit we're trying to form; and like any new habit we try and embrace, it takes time and repetition to get there. Two things that have been proven to help habit formation are accountability and support. In the context of VISTA supervision, this might look like sharing your intentions with your supervisor and your member and letting them know what you need in order to move towards action. Walk them through the new tools you will be using and ask them to respect your new prioritization boundaries. Share your goals and discuss them during meetings and check-ins as a way to create accountability for yourself. And ask them to tell you if they notice your supervision improving! There's a good chance they will, and receiving positive feedback is a great way to affirm our efforts.

Next, be clear on what your motivations for improvement are. An easy way to do this is to think about the benefits of improving your supervision and the cost of not. When you conclude this session, take a few minutes to write down the reasons that you would like to work on your supervision skills, and name the cost and the benefit associated with each. Put these on your work plan or a post-it note, or if you're into it, create a vision board to keep in your work space to remind you of what you're trying to accomplish. When you find yourself slipping into old patterns review your cost-benefits, and use them as a tool to realign your intentions with your actions.

Finally, give yourself grace as you work to incorporate your new skills into your supervision. And as you do this, remember that you are role-modeling positive personal and professional development to your VISTA member, which is an amazing opportunity. Show them what it looks like to strive for improvement, try new things, and learn as you go.

I want to thank you for taking the time to listen in today, and for committing yourself to National Service by supporting AmeriCorps VISTA. This program wouldn't work if it weren't for the great people like you. Best of luck, and thanks again!